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The Historical Borders and the Cross-Border Connections' Effect on Debrecen's Spirituality and Cultural Economy

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Abstract: *In the current paper we wanted to investigate the historical process which resulted in Debrecen's contemporary (cultural) traditions and formed the city's self-image. In the course of the research which was after the city's historic past we investigated the role of the changing borders and the possibilities of the cross-border Euroregional cooperation as well. The nearby border has effect on the city's economic and tourist life. In the last years (during the urban regeneration), many projects were realised, which beside the reconstruction of the cityscape, promoted the increase of the city's attractive force as well. Debrecen's cultural economy rests partly on those infrastructure developments, which were carried out during the last one and a half decade. Both the citizens and the tourists can choose from different (cultural) programmes that are offered by the city. Although Debrecen is one of the biggest region centres of Hungary and it has a huge gravitation zone, the cross-border cooperation can strengthen the city's leading position. Debrecen has close and good connection with Oradea. This connection rests on the two cities' common historic past and their common interest. The analysis based mainly on own researches and the knowledge of the city's spiritual and cultural life.*

Keywords: *periphery, urban regeneration, tourism, cultural economy, cross-border connection, Euroregion, Eurometropolis*

Introduction

Debrecen, as regards its population, is the second largest city in Hungary. The city can be found in the eastern part of the Great Hungarian Plain, about 25 kms from the Hungarian-Romanian border. Debrecen lay in the inside part of the country, far away from the borders during the centuries. Under the terms of the Trianon Treaty, which ended the World War I, Debrecen got the eastern frontier of the country, near the new Hungarian-Romanian border. Although the marking out of the new border did not change essentially the city's language and religious composition, Debrecen (similarly to other settlements, which got near the new borders) had to face lots of new challenges (economic difficulties, social problems, periphery situation). The changes, which took place during the last decades – Hungary and Romania's joining to the European Union – caused a new situation and created new possibilities in both countries and the border regions' connection.

Numerous studies and essays have already dealt with Debrecen's borderland position and the city's cross-border connections. Including, the lecturers of the

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Department of Social Geography and Regional Development Planning (University of Debrecen) and those who have a connection with the Department have already treated this topic from different aspect. In the first part of this essay we would like to sketch the historical process that has established Debrecen's spiritual and cultural heritage and the inhabitants' identity in the 21st century. The borders of Hungary changed many times in the 20th century and it affected both the city and its inhabitants seriously. The borders' role has changed a lot since the fall of the communist regime and it has direct effect on the border regions' life. We are going to demonstrate, in a separate section, the border's effect on the city's cultural life and cultural economy. Then we would like to examine those possibilities, which are provided by the joining to the European Union and finally the developing relations between Debrecen and Oradea (Nagyvárad).

The city's past and the past's heritage

Debrecen (thanks to its College and the University of Debrecen) is one of the best studied Hungarian cities. We know a lot about the city's present and the near past, but we have only insufficient knowledge about its early history.

We do not know exactly when Debrecen was established, but the name of the city (according to the remained sources) was mentioned at first in *Regestrum Varadiense* (a collection of judgements, which was registered in Várad (Oradea) in 1235. Debrecen, as regards its geopolitical position, lay in the inside part of the Hungarian Kingdom, in the north-western part of the historical Bihar Comitatus.³ Oradea (the comitat or county seat) and Debrecen belonged to the same administrative unit till almost 800 years. While Oradea was the county seat, Debrecen had economy and educational functions.⁴

Debrecen lay on one of the most important trade-routes of the Hungarian Kingdom, which linked Oradea with Košice (Kassa) and it had a beneficial effect on the city's industry and the development of the business life. It opened up (new) possibilities for the city's merchants and indirectly for the craftsmen to have a connection with Oradea and the Transylvanian cities and beside them they could reach Wallachia and Moldova as well. Northwards they could reach (via Košice) the Polish cities. It indicates Debrecen's lively business life that the city gained many times the right of holding fairs during the Middle Ages. Nowadays the fairs belong to the city's oldest traditions. As a result of the city development Debrecen obtained the title of market-town (*oppidum*) in the 14th century. Partly the citizens' demand for learning may have led to the foundation of (as we know) the first municipal school. The city's far-famed college (Reformed College) was developed from this school during the 16th century.

The 16th century brought many important changes both in the country and the city's life. The medieval Hungarian state's central area got under the control of the Ottoman Empire. The northern and the western part of the country, under the name of Hungarian Kingdom, got into the Austrian Habsburg's hands, while the eastern part kept its relative sovereignty under the name of Principality of Transylvania. Debrecen's geopolitical position suddenly changed. The city, which was in the inside part of the country for a long time, suddenly it found itself on the border (on the periphery) of three country regions. The city, which belonged to Bihar County, became (with Oradea) one of

³ Comitatus was the former name of the Hungarian counties (*vármegye*).

⁴ István Süli-Zakar, "A trianoni magyar-román határon átnyúló kapcsolatok" [The Trianon Hungarian – Romanian cross-border connections], in *Partium: társadalom, területfejlesztés* [Partium: society, regional development], ed. Ferenc Szilágyi and Zoltán Zakota (Oradea / Nagyvárad: Partium Kiadó, 2014), 28.

the frontier cities of the Principality of Transylvania. This situation, which lasted about 150 years, was not favourable to the peaceful production, the steady growth and the building. On the other hand, the city's contemporary identity's roots can be traced back to this stormy, vicissitudinous and eventful 16th and 17th centuries. The city's leaders came from among the richest merchants and beside them lots of craftsmen and (as Debrecen is a city of the Great Hungarian Plain) farmers lived in the city as well. We can read about the city's merchants, that "they are all Hungarian" and "they are self-sacrificing supporters of the national thought, the Magyarisation; they are the spreaders, supporters of culture, school and the church."⁵ The city's inhabitants, who preserved the homogeneity of the Hungarian character under the Turkish occupation of Hungary gave up their Catholic faith in the 16th century and instead of it chose the much more puritan Calvinist (Reformed) faith. The Reformed Church, which took possession of the municipal school (Reformed College), had influence on (beside the religious life) the city's spiritual and cultural life. The city became one of the mental and spiritual centres of the Reformed Church in Hungary within a short time (Calvinist Rome⁶). The Reformed College's (est. 1538) gravitation zone reached shortly farther regions (mainly in the Great Hungarian Plain and Transylvania) inhabited by Hungarians, and while it played important educational and scientific part during the next centuries, established the mental base of the city's university.

At the end of the 17th century, when the great part of Turkish occupied areas became liberated and the Principality of Transylvania merged into the Habsburg Empire, Debrecen's periphery location – in physical sense – ended. Moreover Debrecen gained the highest title, the free royal town in 1693, which could be conferred on the cities in the feudal Hungary. In spite of the seeming favourable circumstances the city's development stopped. One of the reasons might have been that the leaders of the city, similarly to the inhabitants, adopted the reformed faith and the incident mentality. This fact awoke distrust in the Catholic Habsburg Court. At the beginning of the 18th century, with the Habsburgs' help, the Catholics could settle down in the city again. Hereupon the city's religious homogeneity, which lasted almost 150 years ended. While the small Catholic community was engaged in the laying down of the bases (church-building, school organisation) of the communal life, the city's war-weary reformed inhabitants sank into poverty and now they made preparations for self-defence. They watched every new initiation, which came from the Court with suspicion. We can say in other words, that they gave up their own innovative readiness voluntarily and chose obstinately the refusal. The city's development, compare with other Hungarian cities, became slower. Debrecen in the 18th century, within both the country and the county got into a half-periphery position. At that time Debrecen belonged with Oradea to Bihar County. Because of the poor quality roads it was more difficult to keep contact with the country's innovations centres (Pozsony-Bratislava, Buda, and Pest).

In the 19th century from the point of view of Debrecen a series of important, positive tendencies began. In the first half of the century the reformation movement, which showed on country level made possible the slowly modernisation of the economic

⁵ Lajos Zoltai, "Debrecen sz. kir. város története a legrégibb időktől 1693-ig" [Debrecen free royal town's history from the earliest time till 1693], in *Magyar városok fejlődése – Magyarország városai és vármegyéi I. Debrecenz. kir. város – A város múltja, jelene és jövője rövid áttekintésben* [Hungarian cities' development – Hungary's cities and counties I. Debrecen free royal town – The city's past, present and future in a short review], ed. Gyula Kiszely (Budapest: Vármegyei könyvkiadó, 1931), 60.

⁶ Calvinist Rome refers to the city's leading religious role.

life and the society as well. Partly this changing attitude made possible the Jews' settling down in Debrecen from the 1840s. Firstly the merchants and the craftsmen's strata became stronger by them. During the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 and the War of Independence Debrecen was the capital city of the country for almost a half year. The government resided in the city and the parliament held its meetings here as well. Besides the fact that these events made Debrecen for a short time, the most important city of the country it had important, positive effect on the city's self-image and the citizens' mentality: Debrecen became the protector of the country's independence (őrváros). Hungary's general economic and social development continued (temporarily in hostile political surroundings) after the failure of the War of Independence. In the case of the city the making of the railway lines played important part in the development. Debrecen preceded its similar size rivals when the railway reached the city in 1857. The railway reached Nyíregyháza, Miskolc, Kassa (Košice), Nagyvárad (Oradea) and the Transylvanian cities only some years later. In the second half of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century many railway lines were built, whose starting point was Debrecen. The direct railway connection between Debrecen and the nearby Oradea was born in the beginning of the 20th century (Debrecen – Nagykereki – Oradea railway line). The importance of the railway in the city's life is invaluable. Besides it promoted the manufacturing industry's development in Debrecen it formed, along the railway lines, a considerable gravitation zone for the city. The administrative reform in 1876 resulted in further positive changes for the city. In consequence of it Debrecen broke away from the Oradea headed Bihar County and became the centre the newly organised Hajdú County. Beside the newly gained administrative function Debrecen was the economic, educational, cultural and the religious centre of northeast Hungary at that time. The city's building stock, which became determinant historical and morphological element of the city centre, began to take shape at that time. By the beginning of the 20th century Debrecen became the centre of not only the north Hungarian Great Plain areas, but its gravitation zone went beyond the borders of the county and with variable degree and intensity but it extended gradually to the country's north-eastern region as well. Debrecen's biggest rivals were Košice and Oradea at that time. Both Debrecen and Pozsony (Bratislava) got a university at the same time (1912). The establishment of the university had great importance in many respects. It helped the city's spiritual and cultural development and preserved its regional leading part.⁷ The outbreak of the World War I then its losing circumscribed Debrecen's further large-scale plans.

Changing borders – the borders' changing role

When Hungary's new borders were marked out in 1920, the features of the settlement's network and the functional connections among the settlements were not taken into consideration and because of them the existed and active gravitation zones broke off and fell to pieces.⁸ While Debrecen got to the eastern borderland (periphery) of the country, the city lost a big part of its traditional gravitation zone. The daily economic,

⁷ István Süli-Zakar and Tibor Kecskés, "Tourism and Cultural Economy of the Historical Towns from the Point of View of Towns' Rehabilitation (Example of Debrecen)," in *Enhancing Competitiveness of V4 Historic Cities to Develop Tourism*, ed. Zsolt Radics and János Péntes (Debrecen: DIDAKT Kft., 2014), 195.

⁸ János Péntes, "Vonzásviszonyok vizsgálata a román-magyar határtérségben" [Gravitation states' research in the Romanian – Hungarian border region], in *Partium: társadalom- és térszerkezet* [Partium: society and configuration], ed. Ferenc Szilágyi and Zoltán Zakota (Nagyvárad: Dokumentum Kiadó, 2013), 107.

cultural and human connections, which had worked previously in natural way, broke off overnight. During the war, the built up injuries aroused lots of tension and tempers on both sides of the border and they made more difficult the restart after the war. During the World War II, with the reannexation of Northern Transylvania to Hungary, the former state was partly restored. After the war, during the communist regimes, the strengthening of the borders' military and defence's function were the main characteristic features. In spite of that Hungary and Romania belonged to the same political and power block, the Hungarian – Romanian border became a closed border. One part of the former border stations was closed down and so the (international) traffic concentrated only on five border stations.⁹

In the eastern block's countries, the events, which took place in 1989-90, caused a new situation on both sides of the Hungarian – Romanian border. After the change of regime, from the beginning of 1990s the citizens of Central and Eastern Europe could move freely. At the beginning of the 1990s new border stations were opened one after the other and the frontier traffic increased considerably. Mainly the shopping tourism's growth was behind the increase of the trips' number and especially the border regions' inhabitants were concerned in it. Different relationships – built on the cultural and financial similarities and interests – were formed successively among those settlements, which lie on both sides of the border. Naturally the fact that there are communities on both sides of the border, which belong to the same ethnic groups, was a motivational factor in the deepening of the border regions' relationships. It had a positive effect on the concerned regions' relationships and it deepened the cooperation among them. The member states of the Schengen Agreement introduced visa regime for Romanian citizens between 1994 and 2002. It had negative effects on the Hungarian – Romanian cross-border cooperation. At about the millennium the former socialist countries' joining came closer to the European Union. Romanian citizens did not need visa to the Schengen states after 2002. Hungary in 2004 and Romania in 2007 joined to the European Union.

From the two countries' joining we could meet with more and more positive motion and change. While the two countries' border was transformed into more formal, their cooperation became closer as well. We have witnessed “the change of the functional role of borders, by changing their perception from border-barriers to linking-borders.”¹⁰ We can say, related to it, that “the new political and economical situation promoted at European level aims to standardize border role policy between countries and transform them into areas of convergence, closure, major economic and cultural interest (...). And in parallel, the military function lost supremacy in favour of a purely administrative function.”¹¹ We could study in the last decade that how the Hungarian – Romanian borderland could change from a hard, closed, debarring border into a soft, open and recipient borderland.¹² “In the two decades after the events of 1989-1990 we have witnessed not only a shaping of the geographical border in terms of boosting the cross-border traffic flow or the cross-border cooperation, but also a mutation from the ethno-national mentalities to a cosmopolitan mentality. In fact, actually speaking, it is not only a

⁹ Süli-Zakar, “A trianoni magyar-román ...,” 30.

¹⁰ Alexandru Ilieș, *Euroregional Cross-border Cooperation Premises at the Eastern External Border of EU. Romania – Borders and Borderlands* (Gdansk-Pelplin, Poland: Geography Institute of University of Gdansk –Bernardinum, 2010), 54.

¹¹ Ibid., 55.

¹² Süli-Zakar, “A trianoni magyar-román ...,” 31.

revelation of culture of cohabitation, but a rediscovery of a coexistence pattern previous to drawing national borders.”¹³

The Hungarian – Romanian border's role in Debrecen's tourism and its effect on the city's cultural economy

In spite of that Romania, contrasted with Hungary, has not belonged to the member states of the Schengen Agreement yet and the border between the two countries (compared with the communist period) has become soft notably and the trips have become easier from one country to the other one. As we have already mentioned, Debrecen can be found about 25 kms from the Hungarian-Romanian border. The city is easily accessible from Romania. From the direction of Valea lui Mihai (Rom.) it can be reached both by car and train. Debrecen has direct transport geography connection with northern Bihor and Sălaj County's settlements. From the direction of Oradea, which is hardly further than 60 kms from Debrecen, it is easier to use the highway than travel by train. The direct railway connection, which existed between the two cities, discontinued after 1920, and later (after the World War II) one section of the track was demolished in the border region. Debrecen, similarly to Oradea has an international airport. In our opinion the air transport's possibility, in relation to the cities' connection, has not been put to account yet. Beside the city's transport connections and the possibilities, which come from them, the city marketing also plays a great part in Debrecen's tourism.

The tourists who visit the city can arrive with different purposes. Because of the nearby border the shopping tourism has great importance, but lots of tourists come from Romania to attend a cultural or a sport event and beside them we have to mention the health tourism as well. We can find, on both sides of the border, European famous spas or spas with regional importance which are visited by many tourists who come from the other country. The Debrecen spa is also very popular among those tourists who come from Romania. Major share of the foreign guests who use the city spa's tourism services – partly because of the geographical closeness – come from the neighbouring countries, including Romania (Partium, Transylvania). We can say that the “medical vacations play an increasingly significant role year by year in the motivation behind the trips of tourists arriving in both countries, but especially in Hungary.”¹⁴

Although not all tourists', who visit Debrecen, first aim is a cultural programme, but after all, because of the useful way of passing the time, some of them insert a museum or an exhibition visiting into their programme, or they watch a performance and maybe they attend a cultural programme too. “One of the main aims of travelling is the demand to learn about other people and their culture. (...) So, culture is an important attractive force for tourism, tourism provides audience for cultural events, and generally enhances the production, protection, extension and sale of cultural goods.”¹⁵

Nowadays the conference tourism plays more and more important part in the two countries' relationship. The conference tourism has important part in Debrecen's cultural economy as well. We have to mention here the exemplary cooperative relationship, which

¹³ Ioan Horga and István Süli-Zakar, “Contributions of Institute for Euroregional Studies Oradea-Debrecen to Shaping the Border into a Space for Knowledge and Development,” *Analele Universităţii din Oradea / Relaţii Internaţionale şi studii Europene II* (Oradea: Editura Universităţii din Oradea, 2010): 170.

¹⁴ Lóránt Dávid, Zoltán Bujdosó, and Géza Tóth, “Tourism Planning in the Hajdú-Bihar – Bihor Euroregion,” in *Neighbours and Partners: On the Two Sides of the Border*, ed. István Süli-Zakar (Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 2008), 328.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 330.

has been formed between the University of Debrecen and the University of Oradea. The universities in addition to organise conferences and international seminars, they often organise tutor and student exchange programmes and they participate in the development of common projects as well. "From the tourist point of view (...) the business aim is represented, too, as there are several companies on cities belong, where partnerships, international cooperation, even multinational companies develop and are involved on both sides of the border."¹⁶ There are lots of families, which have family connections on the other side of the borders and many people visit, because of the family relations, the border regions' settlements. In relation to it we have to mention that the language and the cultural consciousness, which can connect the same ethnic groups on both sides of the borders, have great importance. So we can say that the language is an important factor for the cultural identity.¹⁷

During the last 10-15 years, owing to the different urban regeneration projects, Debrecen's those quarters (the city centre, Nagyerdő – Great Forrest), which are the most popular among the tourists, underwent considerable reconstructions. In the case of Debrecen, the city centre (mainly the area of the cultural district) and the Great Forrest mark out the city's traditional cultural-spiritual fields of force. We can find here those institutions and those required infrastructures, which can offer places for different city-level cultural programmes.

Owing to the building-reconstruction projects the city's building stock was renewed and modernised in the last one and a half decade, while many new pedestrian squares and streets were also formed.¹⁸ Every important historic building, which has religious, historical or cultural importance and is popular among the tourists, was renewed in the near past. The Reformed Great Church, which is the city's symbol, stands out among the historic buildings, but we have to mention the Reformed College, Déri Museum and the name of Csokonai National Theatre as well. The Outdoor Stage of the Nagyerdő was also modernised and reconstructed in 2014. The city grew richer with numerous new buildings (Főnix Hall, Kölcsey Centre, **MODEM Centre for Modern and Contemporary Arts, Agora Science Centre**) during the last years. The building of Lovarda¹⁹ got a new (cultural) function and was also renewed at the beginning of the new millennium. These institutions, with their high quality programmes and services play important part in Debrecen's cultural and tourist life. We could see the change and the dynamic development of Debrecen's cultural economy during the last two decades.²⁰

Almost every bigger institution project of the last years had a connection with the development of Debrecen's cultural economy. Unambiguously the strengthening of the tourist character was behind the reconstruction of the Great Church in 2013-2014. Within

¹⁶ Constantin Țoca and Ioan Horga, "Sociological Research. Thinking the Future together the Debrecen-Oradea Cross-border Agglomeration," in *Neighbours and Partners: On the Two Sides of the Border*, ed. István Süli-Zakar (Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 2008), 76.

¹⁷ Alina Stoica and Constantin Țoca, "Romanian – Hungarian Cross-Border Cultural and Educational Relations," in *Cross-Border Partnership / With Special Regard to the Hungarian – Romanian – Ukrainian Tripartite Border*, ed. Ioan Horga and István Süli-Zakar (Debrecen-Oradea: University of Debrecen Press – University of Oradea Press, 2010), 73.

¹⁸ Tibor Kecskés, "Debrecen belvárosának a rehabilitációja az 1990-es évektől napjainkig" [The rehabilitation of Debrecen Downtown since the 1990s], *Debreceni Szemle – 2014 válogatás* [Debrecen Review – 2014 selection], 1, 22 (2015): 49-53.

¹⁹ The name of Lovarda comes from the former stable where the hussars' horses were kept.

²⁰ Süli-Zakar and Kecskés, "Tourism and Cultural Economy ...," 217.

the church building, beside others, a church history exhibition, and a multifunctional communal hall and between the two towers an outdoor lookout was formed while the inner place became suitable for concerts. In the Kölcsey Centre (opened in 2006) different theatre performances, concerts, exhibitions, balls, parties and conferences can be organised. The Főnix Hall (from 2002) was the host of many local and international sport programmes. Beside the sport events, concerts and different cultural programmes can also be organised here. Lots of performers, artists and visitors, who attend these programmes, have come from the neighbouring Romania. The exhibitions of Déri Museum, MODEM and the church history exhibition of the Reformed College are also visited by many foreign tourists. The church art collection and the exhibition of the Reformed College are also visited by many Hungarian groups over the frontier. Many of them come from Transylvania (Romania) and from the Zakarpattia Oblast (Ukraine). In their case the religious and cultural identities play important part. The audience of Csokonai National Theatre mainly comes from the city or from its neighbourhood, but sometimes (because of the near border) artists, visitors or organised groups can arrive from Romania, as well. It may probably have language and cultural reasons that in the case of cross-border human connections the Hungarian – Hungarian contacts more often occur than the Hungarian – Romanian contacts.²¹

As we have already mentioned connected with different urban regeneration projects, many pedestrian squares and streets were formed in the city centre of Debrecen in the last years. A part of them has both relaxing function and can be used as a place for different cultural programmes. Debrecen's new pedestrian squares and pedestrian streets besides that they give place for many important programmes and supporting programmes they have also increased the city's and the city centre's attractive force. In these programmes we can welcome performers, artists and different art groups, who often come from the other part of the border. The main square, which can be found in front of the Great Church serves equally as a place for bigger city programmes (Flower Carnival and its supporting programmes, International Festival of Military Bands, Christmas Fair, different commemorations, political mass meetings etc.), while the square's shady parks have important recreation role as well. The different gastronomical days ("Mangalica" Pig Festival, Turkey Days etc.), which have been held on the main square for some years, are partly based on the local and the regional's traditional farming and eating habits. These gastronomical programmes have become deservedly popular amongst both the Hungarian and the foreigner visitors. However we have to mention that the audience or spectators of those programmes, which are offered by the city, come first of all from the city's inhabitants and from among who live in the city's surroundings. We can say that, the programme tourism has important tradition in this region and numerous festivals are organised every year. On the other hand their characteristic feature is that they have only local or regional attractive force.²² The different fairs are especially very popular among

²¹ István Szűcs, "Az Észak-alföldi Régió határokon átvélő együttműködésének perspektívái" [The Northern Great Plain Region's cross-border cooperation perspectives], in *A régiók Magyarországa II. Hálózatok és labirintusok* [The regions' Hungary II. Networks and labyrinths], ed. Tamás Kaiser, Attila Ágh and Judit Kis-Varga (MTA Szociológiai Kutatóintézet, 2007), 182.

²² István Szűcs, "Területi kormányzás alapjai és perspektívái az Észak-alföldi Régióban: Észak-alföldi Régió, az Európai Unió keleti kapuja" [The bases of the regional government and its perspectives in the Northern Great Plain Region: The Northern Great Plain Region, the eastern gate of the European Union], in *A régiók Magyarországa I. A regionális intézményrendszer*

the tourists. In these fairs we can meet both hucksters and buyers who come from the other side of the border. The fair of the craftsmanship products, which are on higher level, is mainly organised in the city's main square. Debrecen's big trade fair, which is based on the city's time-honoured customs, is organised twice a year (in May and in September). We have already concluded, in connection with Debrecen's cultural economy, that it gains more and more importance in the city's everyday life.²³

The cities' different (cultural, economic etc.) effects on their surroundings are well known. The changing role of the borders have contributed to the cities' (Debrecen, Oradea) gravitation zones' expansion over the border. In that case if between these cities a kind of closer cooperation was realised they could join their forces and they would have more important effect on their surroundings. We can conclude that the smaller settlements in the border regions can enjoy the benefits from the positive effects of the fast growing bigger cities' (or the cross-border Eurometropolises') cultural economy.²⁴

Debrecen's cross-border (Euroregional) relationships

In our region the borders' social-economic development's hindering effect is well known and we can ascribe great importance to the borders' dividing role in the backwardness of the borderland.²⁵ We can talk about the borders' dividing function in past tense, but the periphery position and the backwardness, which have come from the closeness of the border and have existed for decades, are difficult to change overnight. However Western European examples demonstrate that the borderland position do not mean disadvantage for the social-economic development in itself, moreover it can be definitely advantageous too. Let's think the Western European examples, where the borders' dividing function has ended and the cooperation, what is based on the mutual interest, has become conspicuous. Hungary's north-eastern region, within the country, is in a periphery position in geographical sense and it often means a multiple disadvantageous position.²⁶ Debrecen's position is specific in this sense. On the one hand Debrecen, as an innovation centre, has important positive effect on its surroundings. On the other hand the neighbouring, underdeveloped (mainly borderland) regions can also have negative effect on the city (uneducated and unskilled workforce's moving to the city, the neighbourhood's limited business potential, indifference – which comes from the social-cultural backwardness – for the city's different cultural programmes etc.). From the point of view of this region's development there is an important role the cross-border contacts and cooperation. The contacts can occur in established or regular – on county, micro region, association, and self-government level – and in irregular forms.

From the beginning of the 1990s (following the Western European examples) more and more people (researchers, businessmen, politicians etc.) urged in the Central

körvonalai [The region's Hungary I. The regional institutional system's profile], ed. Tamás Kaiser, Attila Ágh and Judit Kis-Varga (MTA Szociológiai Kutatóintézet, 2007), 261.

²³ Süli-Zakar and Kecskés, "Tourism and Cultural Economy...", 214-217.

²⁴ István Süli-Zakar, "Debrecen-Nagyvárad eurometropolisz közös fejlesztését megalapozó kutatások" [Debrecen – Oradea's historical cooperation], in *A településföldrajz aktuális kérdései* [The Timely Questions of the Urban Geography], ed. Zoltán Csapó and Zsolt Kocsis (Szombathely: Savaria University Press, 2010), 41; István Süli-Zakar, "A határon átnyúló kapcsolatok általános bemutatása" [The Cross-Border Connections' General Presentation], in *Partium: társadalom- és Térszerkezet* [Partium: society and configuration], ed. Ferenc Szilágyi and Zoltán Zakota (Nagyvárad: Dokumentum Kiadó, 2013), 22.

²⁵ Süli-Zakar, "A határon átnyúló kapcsolatok ...," 16; Süli-Zakar, "A trianoni magyar-román ...," 24.

²⁶ Süli-Zakar, "A határon átnyúló kapcsolatok ...," 15.

European countries the cooperation among the borderland regions and the strengthening of the regional cohesion. At the beginning of the 1990s, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the unification of the European markets led to the growing importance of the development of the (Central) European border regions. In more direct way, these processes also led “to the opening of the borders and the creation of zones and regions characterised by economic, cultural and historical cooperations.”²⁷ We can add that it is a generally accepted opinion – all over Europe – that “the Euroregions play a serious role in the integration processes” and the “Euroregions most of all are expected to moderate the regional differences. Nevertheless, they have a similarly significant role in the conservation of the local and regional identities through their cultural relations and programmes.”²⁸

“The general objectives of the Euroregion aim: to maintain and develop good neighbourly relations, identifying areas of potential cross-border cooperation; organizing and coordinating those activities that promote collaboration between its members in social, economic, cultural, educational, health, environment and tourism.”²⁹ In Central and Eastern Europe mainly the cultural heritage and the strong historical ties can be the connecting links among the nations, and they can help the achievement and the increase of the cooperation among the countries.

Recognising the importance of the cooperation, the North and Western European model of the regionalism gradually became a Europe-wide model and by the end of the 1990s, in the Central and Eastern European countries both on local and regional level, more and more cross-border cooperation was realised and it increased the Euroregions’ number.³⁰ Hungary is the originator and participant of numerous Euroregional cooperations in the Central European region. We can set down that Hungary’s all counties – and its many cities and chambers of commerce – are also participants in some kind of Euroregional cooperations.³¹ The country’s Euroregions, which have concern with the Hungarian – Romanian border regions are the next: Carpathian Euroregion, Danube–Criş–Mureş–Tisa Euroregion, Bihar-Bihar Euroregion, and Hajdú-Bihar – Bihar Euroregion. The Carpathian Euroregion’s deed of foundation – it was the first cross-border cooperation between Hungary and the bordering countries – was ratified in Debrecen in 1993.

Close cooperation formed between Hajdú-Bihar County (Hungary) and Bihar County (Romania) as well as between the two county seats, Debrecen and Oradea during the last years. (Both counties are members of the Carpathian Euroregion.) Hajdú-Bihar – Bihar Euroregion, which was organised in 2002, ensures organised framework for this cooperation. This Euroregion is “an ideal “ground” for cultural tourism, as it is the meeting area of two nations and two different cultures, however, the cultural roots are vividly alive today as well.”³² The region’s one of the most important natural sources is the medicinal water. Health resorts or spas, which attract a mass of people from both inland and from the area of the neighbouring country, can be found on both sides of the border. Tourism is one of the most important sections of the market economy. In Hungary Békéscsaba – Gyula – Debrecen –

²⁷ Klára Czimre, “Cross-border Cooperation – Theory and Practice – For Geographers and Geography Teachers” (Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 2006), 108.

²⁸ Ibid., 109.

²⁹ Stoica and Țoca, “Romanian – Hungarian Cross-border ...,” 70.

³⁰ Czimre, “Cross-Border Co-operation ...,” 109-110.

³¹ István Süli-Zakar and Klára Czimre, “A határon átnyúló (CBC) kapcsolatok Magyarország körül” [The cross-border (CBC) connections around Hungary], in *Debreceni Szemle* 1, 15 (Jan 2007): 50.

³² Dávid, Bujdosó and Tóth, “Tourism Planning in ...,” 330.

Hajdúszoboszló, while in Romania Moneasa – Tinca – Băile Felix – Oradea – Săcuieni are those settlements that have the most important thermal water springs in the border region. “The rising spa tourism tends to become a real economic engine for the region.”³³ Beside the thermal waters, other important attractive forces are, in tourist sense, the Hortobágy puszta (Hungarian steppe) in Hungary and the climatic health resorts in Romania.

We think it necessary to mention, that “the process of creating an economically and socially dynamic area within the Hungarian-Romanian border space is based on developing a new culture of diversity.”³⁴

One of the most typical characteristic features of all borderland regions is the cooperation, which has begun in the human sphere. The common language and the family relationships may stand behind the fact that the Hungarian – Hungarian connections are more common than the Hungarian – Romanian connections in the human sphere.³⁵ It is also true in the case of the Hungarian – Romanian border region that beside the cultural and educational-scientific common projects more and more plans were realised in the field of economy during the last years. We can consider positive thing that the business connections have become closer in the borderland regions and in many places common interest has shown among the regions’ market participants.³⁶ However in many cases it shows problems, in connection with the Euroregional cooperation, that there are significant differences (different institution systems, the partners’ different sphere of authority etc.) between the two sides of the border that can make more difficult the cooperation.³⁷

Whereas a kind of rivalry is occurring nowadays among the regions, so the importance of the regions’ marketing is reevaluated. The region marketing’s aim is, in our case, the stressing of the cross-border investment opportunities in the Hungarian – Romanian borderland region. We should not forget that the stake of the contention is very big, as the region’s marketing can confirm the carrying out of the region’s development plans.³⁸

Debrecen – Oradea: Common past – common future?

Debrecen and Oradea have common historical and cultural roots and though these centuries-old ties after Trianon and during the communist period became weaker, the two cities established closer links during the last two decades. Debrecen and Oradea are twin towns to each other. This manifold cooperation that characterizes the two cities’ relationship includes all fields of the life and it cannot be listed. We have to mention that in Central and Eastern Europe there were twin towns and similar county connections (maybe between those counties, which can be found on both side of the border) during the socialist period as well. These connections were mainly formals and they were hardly more than a protocol or a cultural relationship.³⁹

The cooperation between the two cities, which lie about 60 kms from each other, is promoted by the similar size, the similar number of inhabitants, the similar geographical (borderland) position and the problems, which come from it (periphery position within the

³³ Horga and Süli-Zakar, “Contributions of Institute for Euroregional Studies ...,” 172.

³⁴ Ibid., 173.

³⁵ István Szűcs, “Az Észak-alföldi Régió határokon,” 182.

³⁶ Szűcs, “Területi kormányzás,” 269.

³⁷ Süli-Zakar, “A határon átnyúló kapcsolatok ...,” 26.

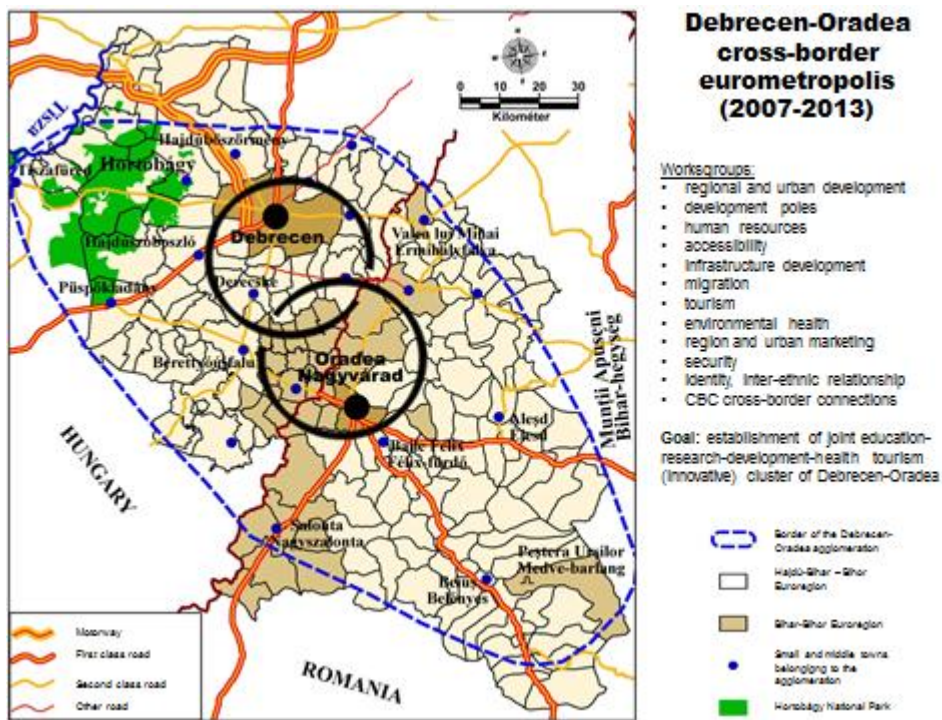
³⁸ Szűcs, “Területi kormányzás,” 270.

³⁹ Süli-Zakar and Czimre, “A határon átnyúló (CBC) kapcsolatok ...,” 27.

countries). The positive Western European examples of the regional cooperation has also anticipated both the two (border divided) neighbouring counties and the cities' advance.

From the 1990s, both Debrecen and Oradea's leaders, have favoured (among others) the economic, cultural and scientific strengthening of the cooperation. Jean Monnet Research Institute (Institute for Euroregional Studies "Jean Monnet" European Centre of Excellence – Oradea/Debrecen), which was founded some years ago, took in hand the common projects' scientific establishment. The elaboration of the innovation-directed, cross-border common economic development and cooperative projects contribute the establishment of Euroregions and Eurometropolises. Researches have been started (among other things) in favour of the establishment Debrecen – Oradea cross-border Eurometropolis (DebOra Project).

Figure 1. Debrecen – Oradea cross-border Eurometropolis (DebOra)



Source: edited by the authors.

Debrecen and Oradea, these two county seats, that are about 60 kms from each other, organize their surroundings into a common agglomeration. The insufficient developments of the transport network and the fact, that there is not motorway and direct railway connection between the neighbouring county seats have disadvantageous effects on the two cities' transport connection. The former direct railway connection has not been re-established yet and for the moment the motorway making also bypasses this borderland region. The motorway making and the development of the air transport are in the interest of both cities. We have mentioned before, in connection with it, that the establishment of the regional airport system can result in a considerable improvement of the accessibility of the Central and Eastern European countries and the border regions. We are convinced that

the Debrecen Airport can have important role in this system.⁴⁰ Debrecen is one of the regional centres of the country and it gives the city free hand. At the same time Oradea (in Romania) plays second fiddle within the North-western Region and the city's gravitation zone (apart from the church functions) hardly outreaches the county's borders.⁴¹

Nowadays the cultural, educational and the tourist cooperation play important role in the two cities' relationship. Besides the daily shopping tourism, that takes a direction to the other city, the visiting of the other city's different cultural programmes (concerts, theatrical performances, exhibitions etc.) is also important. But beside these programmes, the thermal water based health tourism, the conference tourism, the sport tourism and the programme tourism (gastronomical days, travel fairs etc.) also plays important role in the two cities' relationship.

Debrecen Flower Carnival, which is held on 20th August, stands out from the cultural programmes. The Carnival has been held since the 1960s and more than 100.000 visitors arrive in Debrecen to see the flower-decorated cars' procession every year. We can say that this event is the biggest tourist attraction of the city and for the sake of it lots of tourists come from different parts of the world. Beside others lots of performers and tourists come from the nearby Oradea as well. Debrecen wanted to share the Carnival's "experience" with Oradea, when the Carnival's export arose at the beginning of the 21st century. In course of the "Open Window to Europe" programme, the flower-decorated cars from Debrecen procession Oradea's street as well. The Oradea Flower Carnival (similarly to Debrecen's) provides possibility to organize different supporting programmes (folk music festivals, folk dance groups' appearance etc.). One part of the performers also visited the minor towns and villages in both Bihor County (Romania) and Hajdú-Bihar County (Hungary) during the last years. We have to mention several of the common cultural programmes, the Euroregional Music Festival, which is organised every year. In course of it (among others) the Oradea Philharmonic has given some successful concerts and different folk singers, classical music and light music bands could give concerts both in Bihor and the neighbouring Hajdú-Bihar counties.⁴²

The statement that in the increasing rivalry for the investments, projects and the qualified experts the cities lay special emphases on the environment, the culture and the integrated city management, concerns the Hungarian – Romanian border's cities too. The number of the neighbouring cities' cooperation increased during the last years and by the help of it they could unite their sources and possibilities.⁴³ If we look into the projects, we can conclude that – during the last years – those big cities, which are near the borders (gateway function) got into a favourable situation: as the base of multinational companies and organisations, they could attract important projects to themselves. These gateway cities' diplomatic and business life become lively and these cities increase their international marketing role, the importance of both the higher education and the conference tourism as well.⁴⁴ In Eastern Hungary the next cities have gateway city

⁴⁰ Süli-Zakar, "A határon átnyúló kapcsolatok ...," 24.

⁴¹ Csaba Miklós Kovács, "Nagyvárosi együttműködések, közös metropoliszi övezetek a román-magyar határ mentén" [Big city cooperation, common metropolis areas along the Romanian-Hungarian border, in *Partium: társadalom- és térszerkezet* [Partium: society and configuration], ed. Ferenc Szilágyi and Zoltán Zakota (Nagyvárad: Dokumentum Kiadó, 2013), 58.

⁴² Stoica and Țoca, "Romanian – Hungarian Cross-border ...," 73-74.

⁴³ Bálint Filep, "A nagyvárosok az európai és a magyar területi politikában" [The big cities in the European and the Hungarian regional politics] (Pécs – Győr: Széchenyi István Egyetem Regionális- és Gazdaságtudományi Doktori Iskola, Publikon Kiadó, 2014), 147.

⁴⁴ Süli-Zakar, "Debrecen-Nagyvárad eurometropolisz ...," 42.

function: Debrecen, Békéscsaba, Szeged and Nyíregyháza. On the other side of the border, the next Romanian cities have the same function: Satu Mare, Oradea and Arad.

Figure 2. A flower-decorated car in Oradea with Debrecen's symbol the Great Church on top.



Source: Personal blog article, “Virágkarnevál nagyváradi története 2006-2011” [Flower Carnival Oradea History 2006-2011], accessed May 20, 2015, <http://egyvaradiblogjanagyvaradrol.blogspotHu/2013/08/viragkarneval-nagyvaradi-tortenete-2006.html>.

Conclusions

Debrecen, this typical Hungarian city, which can be found in the eastern part of the Great Hungarian Plain, could grow in peace for centuries inside of the country. Beside the industry and the commerce (because of geographical reasons) the agriculture also played a great part in the past. Debrecen's merchants had close commercial contacts with remote regions as well. Nowadays the fairs belong to the city's lively traditions. Only the Turkish period brought bigger change in the city's life. While the city's ethnic composition did not change, the citizens became reformed. Debrecen's famous school, the Reformed College originated at that time. At the age of Habsburgs the city's true-born Hungarian citizens⁴⁵ had a strong dislike of the royal court. The city's development continued in the 19th century till the outbreak of the World War I. While Debrecen's economic and administrative role grew, the city became the religious, cultural and educational centre of Northeast Hungary by the beginning of the 20th century.

The new borders, which were determined in 1920, were not favourable to the city's development (periphery position). While the new border cut off Debrecen from its natural partners (Oradea and the Transylvanian cities) it lost a considerable part of its gravitation zone. As we could see, the borders' function changed many times during the last century. “The Hungarian-Romanian border, (...) from the fall of communism and (...) from the Trianon Treaty, has changed its status of hard, close, exclusive border to that of soft, open,

⁴⁵ Their nickname was “cívís,” which comes from the Latin word “civis” and means *citizen*. Debrecen is the city of cívís (cívísváros).

inclusive frontier.”⁴⁶ This change has made possible (following the Western European examples) the organisation of the common historical, cultural tradition and business interests based Euroregions since the 1990s. We can say that by now the Euroregions and the Eurometropolises, in the eastern periphery of the European Union, have become organic part of everyday life.⁴⁷ Those Euroregion organisations, which refer to the Hungarian – Romanian section of frontier, are based on the mutual partnership. The language and family ties that can occur on both sides of the border can make stronger this union. In the Hungarian – Romanian borderland region the thermal water, the common history and the culture-based tourism is one of the most important factors of the economic life.

In Debrecen’s life (in the cultural economy) the tourism plays more and more important part. One part of the tourists, who visit the city come from the neighbouring Romania. The city centre and the Great Forest are, from the point of view of tourism, the most important part of the city. Owing to the urban regeneration important changes and improvements took place during the last two decades. The renewed and the newly built cultural institutions with the renewed public squares are the perfect scenes for different (cultural) programmes.

Debrecen always had close and special relationship with Oradea. The two cities’ relationship has become closer since the change of regime. Their cooperation (we can say it) covers the life’s every part. The geographical neighbourhood, the similar sizes, the economic interests (see city competition) and the collectively organised agglomeration zone urge the two cities on the closer cooperation in the future. We consider, as regards the two cities, far the most important thing Debrecen and Oradea’s cross-border cooperation and their growing into a Eurometropolis.⁴⁸

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⁴⁶ Horga and Süli-Zakar, “Contributions of Institute for Euroregional Studies ...,” 170.

⁴⁷ István Süli-Zakar, “A határok és a határon átnyúló kapcsolatok ártérkelődése Kelet-Közép-Európában” [The bases of the regional government and its perspectives in the Northern Great Plain Region: The Northern Great Plain Region, the eastern gate of the European Union], in *Közép-Európai Közlemények* [Central European Publications] 4-5, 2 (2009), 143.

⁴⁸ Süli-Zakar, “Debrecen-Nagyvárad eurometropolisz ...,” 42.

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